

REMARKS

Claims 1-3, 5, and 7 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 1 and 7 are amended and claim 6 is canceled. Support for the amendments may be found in the original claims and, for example, in the originally filed specification at page 8, lines 18-20. No new matter is added.

In view of the foregoing amendments and following remarks, reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested.

I. Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

A. Claims 1 and 3

The Office Action rejects claims 1 and 3 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as having been obvious over the following combinations of references: (1) JP 2001-313066 to Katsunori et al. ("Katsunori") further in view of JP 2000-100410 to Masahito et al. ("Masahito"); and (2) Katsunori further in view of Masahito and JP 07-134979 to Gowikawa et al. ("Gowikawa"). By this Amendment, claim 1 is amended to contain the subject matter of non-rejected claim 6, and claim 3 depends from claim 1. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

B. Claims 2 and 5-7

The Office Action rejects claims 2 and 5-7 under the following combinations of references: (1) Katsunori and Masahito as applied to claim 1, and further in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0091903 to Sato et al. ("Sato"); and (2) Katsunori, Masahito and Gowikawa as applied to claim 1, and further in view of Sato. By this Amendment, claim 6 is canceled, rendering its rejection moot. As to the remaining claims, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection.

By this Amendment, claim 1 is amended to require that "each of the plurality of papermaking web layers contains split type compound fibers by a weight percent, X, where

30 wt.% \leq X \leq 50 wt.%, and the split type compound fibers are obtained by blending and spinning two or more different components, forming into a cloth, and splitting."

As acknowledged by the Office Action, Katsunori, Masahito, and Gowikawa do not teach to vary the sulfonation degree and use split type compound fibers. See pages 3 and 6. For at least the reasons discussed below, Sato, which is relied upon by the Office Action for the additional features recited in claim 6, fails to cure the deficiencies of Katsunori, Masahito, and Gowikawa with respect to these features as now incorporated into claim 1.

Sato is silent regarding the compound fibers being "obtained by blending and spinning two or more different components, forming into a cloth, and splitting," as required by claim 1. One of skill in the art would readily understand that compound fibers "obtained by blending and spinning two or more different components, forming into a cloth, and splitting" would be structurally different and distinct from the "core/sheath structure having an inner and outer, double structure" disclosed by Sato.

Also, an aqueous battery according to claim 1 exhibits results that are unexpected over the applied references that are attributable to the plurality of papermaking web layers containing split type compound fibers in an amount of 30 to 50 wt% as set forth in claim 1. See Applicants' specification at page 8, lines 11-17, which states:

By containing split type compound fibers by 30 wt.% or more, the inter-electrode path can be extended, and formation of conductive path coupling between electrodes can be suppressed. Further, by the content of 50 wt.% or less, the fiber density of the separator is prevented from being excessive. As a result, lowering of permeability of the separator is suppressed, and elevation of the internal pressure of the alkaline storage battery can be suppressed at the same time.

Nowhere does Sato, nor the other applied references, teach or otherwise suggest that the effects described above could be obtainable by using split type compound fibers of claim 1 in an amount of 30 to 50 wt% in a separator that satisfies the relation of $8.8 \leq A \times B \times C \leq 15.2$, where A is an area density (g/m^2), B is a specific surface area (m^2/g), and C is a

thickness (mm). Accordingly, the results obtained by using split type compound fibers in an amount of 30 to 50 wt% as set forth in claim 1 are unexpected over the applied references.

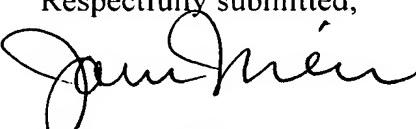
For at least these reasons, the combination of applied references would not have rendered obvious claim 1. Claims 2, 3, 5, and 7 depend from claim 1 and, thus, also would not have been rendered obvious by the references. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

II. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



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